



Parked in the Past

Summer 1954: Camp Carson soldiers march through county

“The Looters” filmed in Eleven Mile Canyon, 6th annual Burro Days

Laura Van Dusen, Correspondent

June 29, 2012

On Aug. 24, the Pro Cycling Challenge will roll through South Park along U.S. 24 east to Colorado Springs.

No doubt, it will be a challenge.

But once riders leave the highest elevations of Park County, between the Hoosier Pass summit and Fairplay, the official race website says that riders may hit the fastest speeds of the week as they approach the downhill slope into Woodland Park.

The mileage between the Mosquito Range and Colorado Springs was more of a challenge when, in late June of 1954, Camp Carson (now Fort Carson) soldiers from the 8th Infantry, reversed the route, going from south of Colorado Springs to the highest elevations of Park County on their way to Camp Hale near Leadville – and did it on foot.

Contributing to the exhausting trek was the weather. At about the time the marchers were leaving Camp Carson, the Colorado Springs area was in the midst

of a heat wave, with 100-degree record temperatures reached on June 23 and 24. The records for those days have never been broken.

The marchers left Camp Carson, went through Manitou Springs, and followed the route of U.S. 24 to Hartsel. From there they followed the route of Colorado Highway 9 to Fairplay and headed toward Alma. They took a left onto the Mosquito Pass Road and continued their march over the Continental Divide to their destination, Camp Hale, 20 miles west of Leadville in Eagle County.

According to information on Google Maps (www.googlemaps.com), the army’s walk through the Park was about 158 miles and took about 51 hours to complete, (not adjusting the time for the weight of packs).

This group of soldiers was at Camp Hale for training in July and August. The training lasted a little over a month. They learned mountain maneuvers such as rock climbing, mountain climbing,

mountain evacuations for injured personnel, and nighttime mountain deployment.

The Sept. 3, 1954, Flume reprinted an article from the Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph that, in reporting the return of another regiment, the 13th Infantry, to Carson from Hale, said, "Nearly 10,000 men from Carson have undergone the summer phase of mountaineering at the two-mile-high post, the largest training program to be held there since World War II."

Soldiers

Private First Class Thomas F. Weirich, assigned to Medical Company, 61st Infantry Regiment, 8th Infantry Division at the then-Camp Carson was one of the soldiers who didn't march from the army base.

He drove a 3/4-ton 4X4 truck loaded with medical and personal supplies to the summit of Mosquito Pass. The mission was to set up a medical aid station that was used for three days, from June 28 to 30, "to provide medical support to infantry soldiers and their attached company medics who marched over 'The Pass' on their way to Camp Hale, Colo.," said Weirich.

Weirich said the soldiers needed only minor medical attention at the Mosquito Pass summit. "A few needed a whiff of oxygen, some needed minor care for foot problems, and some needed cough medicine, (the famous G.I. gin)."

G. I. gin was a cough syrup, heavy in codeine and alcohol, that stops just about any cough immediately, according to an Internet search of several sites.

Mosquito Pass

Weirich had never driven a road like Mosquito Pass. But he was successful.

After another Army vehicle bogged down in mud and snowmelt in a meadow below the summit and its driver gave up driving the pass, Weirich picked up the two medics and the Regimental Surgeon from that vehicle. They joined him and his medic passenger to continue en route to the top. The surgeon rode with Weirich in the cab and the three medics rode on the tailgate and walked at times when the going got rough.

The road was evidently in no better shape 58 years ago than it is today.

Weirich took the canvas cover off the back of the truck and removed the windshield for better visibility. Even so, at one point, Weirich said in a telephone conversation, "I looked out – all I could see was space."

One time along the route, the truck stopped working due to the altitude and the heat of the engine, "a case of vapor lock," Weirich said in an email. To fix the problem, he cut an orange in half and hollowed out the half. He filled it with snow and placed the orange on top of the fuel pump. Weirich said that in about ten minutes, he was able to start the truck again and proceed up the pass.

On one hairpin turn in the road, Weirich had to back up and ease forward three times to get the Army vehicle around the bend. But he made it. He said of his experience driving Mosquito Pass: "It was in the days [when] we had the courage of ignorance."

Movie making

While the soldiers were training at Camp Hale, the movie "The Looters" was in production at 11-Mile Canon (1954 spelling).

The film, starring Julia Adams and Rory Calhoun, began filming in August for a May 1955 release date. According to the Aug. 19, 1954, Flume, half of the movie was filmed there. Parts of the film were also shot on Park County's Tarryall River.

It told the story of a "plane crash in the rugged Rocky Mountains." The poster advertised, "Five desperate men . . . and a girl who didn't care . . . trapped on a mountain of gale-lashed rock!"

Adams, now 85, was then a young beauty in the beginning of her career. She acted in 59 movies beginning in 1949's "Red, Hot and Blue" to a bit part in the 2011 release, "Chez Upshaw." Her credits include more than 100 television appearances, most notably 10 episodes of "Murder, She Wrote."

The handsome male lead was played by Rory Calhoun, who died in 1999 at the age of 76. His acting career began after he was paroled from San Quentin State Prison in California shortly before his 21st birthday. He was discovered while riding a horse in the Hollywood Hills, where he met actor Alan Ladd, whose wife was an agent. He starred in approximately 72 movies, beginning with, "Where Do We Go from Here?" in 1945 to "Pure Country" in 1992. He was a guest star in several television westerns, including "Bonanza," "Wagon Train" and "Gunsmoke," and he appeared in "The Blue and Gray" miniseries in 1982.

Burro Days

The 6th-annual Burro Days celebration and its burro race from Leadville to Fairplay, was predicted to be the "best ever" in the July 15, 1954, Flume. Starr Yelland, radio personality at Denver stations KOA and KLZ, then-member of the South Park Chamber of Commerce, and, since 2001, an inductee into the

Broadcast Professionals Hall of Fame, was master of ceremonies of the burro race that year.

The parade featured a 45-piece marching band from Cripple Creek, a "glass wagon" float from State Game & Fish, and a "nationally publicized float" by Coors Brewing, courtesy of the Fairplay Distributing Company. Prizes for parade floats totaled \$175.

It was reported in the Aug. 5 Flume that Leadville's Tim Martin was first over the finish line, with a time of 4 hours, 17 minutes and 42.5 seconds. He gave his burro, Red, a big kiss after they won the race.

Eve Perkins, an "attractive Leadville teacher," was the third woman over the line. The attractiveness of other racers was not reported.

Prize money has not changed as much as one might expect in the 58 years since the 6th annual race. The first place prize was \$700 (\$1,000 in 2011), second place was \$400 (\$800 in 2011), and third place was \$300 (\$500 in 2011.) In addition, there was a fourth-place prize of \$100 awarded in 1954.

For guessing the winning time of the first place finisher, the 2011 prize was \$500. But in 1954, guessing the winning time paid off better than winning the race. The person who guessed the winning time was awarded \$1,000. There were also prizes for coming in second and third in guessing the winning time.

Montgomery dam

The July 15, 1954, Flume reported that a bid had been accepted by Fisher Contracting of Phoenix to build a dam to flood the former townsite of Montgomery, north of Alma. It was to hold 5,000 acre-feet of municipal water for the city of

Colorado Springs. The bid was \$2,247,672, which was below the engineers' estimate of \$3 million.

Stabbing

There was at least one instance of a soldier bringing his wife to the Camp Hale area, where the couple was housed in a temporary home. That may have caused stress in the marriage.

The July 15, 1954, Flume reported that Sfc. (Sergeant first class) Duane A. Livengood of Oregon was fatally stabbed by his wife, Francis A. Livengood, at their temporary home five miles east of Leadville near Camp Hale. It was reported that they were "fighting and arguing all evening." She was taken to the Lake County Jail.

Changing times

Phone numbers were easier to remember back then. The Flume number was '29.'

A new Ford F-100 pickup cost \$1,695, (state and local taxes extra).

The Fairplay Hospital reported patient names each week, including why the person was admitted, when the person was released, and if the person died while in the hospital. The report included who had tonsillectomies and what town they lived in, which staff members were on vacation, and who the replacement was for the vacationing staffer.

AAA advised tourists to avoid cities during rush hours to "save time and prevent strained nerves," as reported in the Aug. 5, 1954, Flume.

The state of Colorado was expecting four million visitors to the state in 1954 according to the July 15, 1954, Flume. By comparison, in 2011, Colorado broke a record in number of visitors at 57.9

million, according to the Colorado Tourism Office.

Images on the following page.



Classic Shot

It is probable that every person who has been to the summit of Mosquito Pass with a camera has a shot similar to this one, taken at the top of the pass. Army PFC Thomas F. Weirich of Medical Company, 61st Infantry Regiment, 8th Infantry Division, is no exception. This shot was taken June 28, 1954. The Army established a medical aid station near this site. It was active from June 28 to June 30, 1954. (Photo courtesy of Thomas Weirich)



Camp hale

PFC Thomas F. Weirich (left) and PFC Robert W. O'Brien at Camp Hale, Colo., are approximately 20 miles west of Leadville in July 1954. Both were assigned as drivers for medical company light trucks and litter jeeps. Pup tents were living quarters for troops who marched to Camp Hale from Camp Carson south of Colorado Springs in late June 1954. (Photo courtesy of Thomas Weirich)